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Weekly Summary

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CHILE

The Catholic Church in Chile, the only important critic of the government not yet effectively silenced, is increasing pressure on the ruling junta. The clergy's growing militancy may have given the government second thoughts about imposing additional repressive measures.

The church's attitude was made manifest most recently in a strident attack on the government for dissolving Chile's remaining political parties in March. Church leaders under Cardinal Silva, Primate of Chile, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] to press the junta to respect human rights. [REDACTED]

Some Chilean bishops [REDACTED] believe that excommunication of the President and junta members should not be ruled out.

Both junta and church leaders, however, appear anxious to keep the disagreements from leading to a sharp break. President Pinochet is being uncharacteristically conciliatory. He is probably concerned that in enacting a series of harsh measures advocated by a close circle of extreme rightist advisers, he overstepped the bounds of church tolerance. For the moment, he has backed off from some of the heavy-handed policies that incited bitter condemnation from the church and from the Christian Democratic Party, labor leaders, the press, and intellectuals.

The President probably averted a direct confrontation with the church by dismissing on April 20 a controversial justice minister who had publicly attacked a group of bishops for their strong censure of social and political conditions in Chile. The minister, a crony of Pinochet's with a penchant for stepping on toes, had been in office just over a month. The President not only dismissed him, but wrote a letter to the offended bishops disavowing the minister's outspoken views. [REDACTED]

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